

# VETERANS CONNECT

{ ISSUE 12 | 2022 }

## CELEBRATING 75+ YEARS of VA Pittsburgh

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

YEARS

## Dear Veterans,



In 2021, the Veterans Health Administration celebrated 75 years of service to Veterans, marking VA's establishment of the Department of Medicine and Surgery in 1946.

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) traces its beginnings to 1923, when the federal government purchased land for a Veterans tuberculosis hospital on what is now our H.J. Heinz III campus.

Since then, VA Pittsburgh has continuously evolved to meet the unique challenges and health care needs of Veterans from every era at every stage of their lives. We are committed to providing Veteran-centered care. We take a holistic approach to your health, providing not only medical care, but also programs and services to support you throughout your life. We are more than just a place to receive care—we are also a place where you can find communities of support from others who have shared in your experiences.

As VAPHS's director, it is my honor to ensure we uphold VA's legacy of service to Veterans. Our mission is to provide you with the best available health care, and to grow and change to meet your needs. We want to be your provider of choice not only today, but also for the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "DE Koenig".

Donald E. Koenig  
Director, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System



### COVID-19 Vaccines

All Veterans — enrolled in VA health care or not — their spouses and caregivers can receive the vaccine at no cost as walk-ins to our University Drive and H.J. Heinz III campuses, or by appointment at any of our five outpatient clinics. Enrolled Veterans can walk in or make an appointment. Veterans' eligible adolescent children ages 12-17 can receive the vaccine at the University Drive walk-in clinic.

For details, visit [www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/programs/covid-19-vaccines](http://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/programs/covid-19-vaccines)



### Appointments Required for COVID-19 Testing

If you have a sore throat, dry cough, shortness of breath or fever, call our 24-hour nurse call center at 412-360-6000 and press 3 before visiting our facilities or to request an appointment for COVID-19 testing. For administrative questions, call our patient advocates during business hours at 412-360-3614.

For details, visit [www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/operating-status](http://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/operating-status)

# New Clinic to Ease Veterans' Commutes

Our new outpatient clinic to be built just outside the city of Pittsburgh will make it easier for many Veterans in southwestern Pennsylvania to access VA health care.

The U.S. General Services Administration awarded a \$92 million build-to-suit lease for a VA Outpatient Clinic in Monroeville, Pennsylvania. The clinic will be located near the Monroeville Mall Macy's department store on Mall Circle Drive.

VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) will staff and operate the clinic. Construction began last fall. We anticipate it will be completed and opened to the community in 2023.

The new state-of-the-art facility will improve Veterans' access to primary and specialty outpatient services and reduce drive times for many Pittsburgh-area Veterans enrolled in VA care. The 20-year lease includes 64,000 square feet

and parking and supports VA's Strategic Capital Investment Planning process.

"I'm very excited with this news — and the location! It will not only reduce the commute time for thousands of Veterans in our eastern suburbs, but also relieve parking congestion for both Veterans and staff at our flagship hospital in Oakland," said Donald Koenig, VAPHS director. "We look forward to a modern and easily accessible clinic where Veterans will continue to receive high-quality integrated health care."

Services offered at the new clinic will include integrated primary and mental health care, physical therapy, laboratory, podiatry, optometry and more.

Not all primary care will be moved out of University Drive in 2023. We will ensure a planned, smooth transition for all Veterans. We will work with you to determine the best location for you to receive the high-quality care that you have earned and deserve.



# Connect to Your Care

**24/7 Nurse Call Center:**

412-822-2222, press 3

**Audiology:** Hearing, tinnitus and balance disorders. 412-360-6400

**Behavioral Health:** 412-360-6600

**Caregiver Services:** Help at home and someone to listen.  
412-822-2364 or 1-855-260-3274

**Center for Treatment of Addictive Disorders:**

Residential: 412-360-6611

Outpatient: 412-360-6092

**Chaplain Services:** 412-822-1551

**Community Care:** VA-provided care to Veterans through community providers when VA cannot provide the care needed.  
412-822-3840

**Connected Care:** Telehealth, VA Mobile and more. 412-360-3235

**Copays:** Online at pay.gov, by phone at 1-888-827-4817, or in person at any VA medical center.

**Dental:** 412-822-2130

**Emergency Department:** 24-hour emergency physical and mental health care services. 412-360-6322

**Eye Clinic:** 412-360-6700

**Environmental Registries:**  
412-822-1707

**Homeless Veterans:** Transitional and permanent housing, case management, dental and medical care. 412-822-1272

**Help for Homeless Veterans hotline:** 877-4AID-VET (424-3838)

**LGBTQ+ Veteran Care:**  
412-360-1210 or 412-360-6645

**Military Sexual Trauma Support:**  
412-360-6261

**My HealtheVet:** Online access to health records, electronic messaging and prescription refills.  
myhealth.va.gov | 412-360-6838

**Pathology and Laboratory:**  
412-360-1987

**Patient Advocate:** 412-360-3614

**Pharmacy:** Refill prescriptions by phone, mail or the internet.  
412-822-3140

**Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation:** Inpatient and outpatient physical, occupational, and kinesiotherapy. 412-822-2111

**Podiatry:** 412-360-6700

**Post-9/11 Military2VA (M2VA) Case Management:** Health care benefits for new Veterans.  
412-822-2363

**Primary Care:** Annual checkups, nutrition counseling and more.  
412-822-3000

**Prosthetics:** 412-822-3728

**Radiology:** X-ray, ultrasound, CT, and MRI. 412-360-6216

**Release of Information:**  
412-822-1135 or ROIPGH@va.gov

**Research:** 412-360-2386

**Social Work:** Help with goal setting, discharge planning, case management, referrals, counseling, support and more. 412-822-2919

**Speech Pathology:** Treatments for speech, language, voice, cognitive communication, swallowing impairments and training for stroke patients. 412-360-6400

**Spinal Cord Injury:** 412-822-3000

**Surgical Services:** Same-day surgery, neurosurgery and cardiothoracic, hand, ophthalmology, orthopedic, otolaryngology, plastic, transplant and vascular surgery. 412-360-6700

**Travel Office:**

Beneficiary travel: 412-360-1980

Ride scheduling: 412-360-3620

**Vet Centers:** Counseling and referral for combat Veterans, their families, and any Veteran who was sexually traumatized while serving.  
Pittsburgh: 412-920-1765  
Wheeling: 304-232-0587  
White Oak: 412-678-7704

**Veterans Crisis Line:** Confidential help for Veterans in crisis and their families and friends.  
veteranscrisisline.net  
988 then press 1  
Text to 838255

**Voluntary and Recreation Services:** 412-822-3098

**Women's Health Services:**  
412-360-6289

## IF YOU ARE HAVING A MEDICAL EMERGENCY:

**Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.**

If it is not a VA facility:

- Request transfer to a VA facility when medically stable.
- Call **844-724-7842** to notify VA within 72 hours of presenting to a non-VA emergency department.

*Not all Veterans are eligible for every service listed.*

For a more comprehensive list of services, visit [www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/health-services](http://www.va.gov/pittsburgh-health-care/health-services)

# 75 YEARS VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION

## A Legacy of Service. The Future of Care.

In 2021, VA commemorated 75 years of the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which was established in 1946 as the Department of Medicine and Surgery to expand health care for returning World War II Veterans.

Since then, VHA has made vast and wide-ranging contributions to improve the health of Veterans and the entire nation through services and technologies that have changed how health care providers practice medicine.

VA Pittsburgh's legacy of service began 97 years ago on our H.J. Heinz III campus. From that first 226-bed hospital, we grew to add two more campuses, a research office building and five outpatient clinics. We developed partnerships with neighboring universities and civilian health care entities; established programs to benefit Veterans who are homeless, disabled, or in need of specialized mental health care; and developed a world-renowned kidney and liver transplant center, to name just a few accomplishments.

Much like our past, our future centers on you, the Veteran, and evolving to provide health care to meet your changing needs. As you will see in the following pages, our long history of service to Veterans and our plans moving forward prove an unwavering commitment to that sacred mission.



### BRINGING CARE TO YOU

#### VA Outpatient Clinics Established

##### OHIO

- 1996 – Belmont County

##### PENNSYLVANIA

- 1998 – Westmoreland County
- 1999 – Beaver County
- 2001 – Washington County
- 2005 – Fayette County



### SHOWCASING YOUR STRENGTHS

#### Hosted National Veterans Wheelchair Games

1998 and 2011



Our volunteers serve all who enter our doors with dignity and respect, lifting the human spirit among those who might be experiencing the most difficult times of their lives. Whether escorting patients, offering directions or simply sitting vigil quietly at bedside, they free our providers to tend to Veterans' physical and mental health care needs.

## NOTABLE VOLUNTEERS



### Clarence "Code" Gomberg

World War II Veteran Clarence "Code" Gomberg volunteered at VA Pittsburgh for over 70 years, pausing prior to his death

in 2021 only because coronavirus safety measures restricted all volunteer activities. Gomberg's many roles over the years included assisting Veterans in the Heinz ceramics clinic and escorting patients to physical therapy appointments.



### Mrs. F.P. Tarnapowicz

During World War II, Maria "Tarney" Tarnapowicz led the sale of over \$42 million in war bonds to help build VAPHS's

Highland and University drive campuses. The Pittsburgh woman is credited with leading groups that raised \$334 million for Veterans hospitals across the nation between 1942-45.



## VAPHS FIRSTS

### Homeless Veteran Program

In the late '80s and early '90s, social worker Vincena "Vinnie" Malec established a Homeless Veteran Support Program at VA Pittsburgh—the first of its kind for VA. From there, she tirelessly advocated for the establishment in 1993 of VA Pittsburgh's Domiciliary Care Program at its original site on Highland Drive. Malec died in 2015 but her legacy lives on in the 3,455 Veterans—and counting—served through VA Pittsburgh's homeless programs.

### Awake for Open Heart Surgery

- Performed at University Drive in 2000
- 51-year-old patient was awake and talking during the procedure
- First time such a surgery performed in the U.S.

### UNOS Charter

- Established in 2003
- First independent charter in VA for a liver and kidney transplant program with the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)
- VAPHS was one of only four VAs performing liver and kidney transplants at the time

### Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment and Education (PIRATE)

- Started in 2009
- First and only intensive residential aphasia treatment program in the Veterans Health Administration
- 211 Veterans from 45 states served to date

# H. JOHN HEINZ III PROGRESSIVE CARE CENTER

Primary, palliative and hospice care | 175-bed Geriatric Center of Excellence with dementia unit



**1923**

Federal government pays \$125,000 for 147.5 acres of land in O'Hara Township, near Aspinwall, for construction of a Veterans tuberculosis hospital.

**1924**

Construction begins.

**1925**

\$1 million, 13-building hospital complex dedicated. Site includes a 226-bed infirmary, ambulance building, garage, laundry, storage, attendants quarters, nurses residence and officers quarters. | First patient, a World War I Veteran, admitted.

**1934**

Bed capacity increased to 505.

**1936**

Site converted to general medical and surgical hospital.

**1940**

Bed capacity increased to 760.

**1941**

First VA allergy clinic established.

**1947**

Bed capacity increased to 943 to accommodate World War II Veterans.

**1954**

General medical and surgical services moved to Oakland campus.

**1966**

\$110,000, 70-bed nursing care unit opened.



**1987**

Congress approves funding for a replacement hospital.

**1991**

Construction begins on the \$68 million replacement facility.

**1994**

\$68 million, 400-bed replacement facility dedicated. The 350,000-square-foot building includes a chapel, medical library and ceramics workshop.

**1999**

Hospital complex formally renamed H. John Heinz III Progressive Care Center. | \$720,000 donated outdoor, covered Masons' Pavilion dedicated.



**2007**

\$4 million engineering support building opened.

**2008**

\$17 million administration building and \$17 million Veterans Recovery Center dedicated.

**2011**

\$40.8 million Ambulatory Care Center dedicated.

**2013**

Innovative 1,000-square-foot MyHome rehabilitation training lab for Veterans recovering from strokes, falls and surgeries dedicated.

# HIGHLAND DRIVE

60 years' service to Veterans | 900 patients daily | Site of VA's first homeless Veterans program



**1986** | Regional Center for Evaluation and Treatment of Former POWs opened.

**1987** | Compensated Work Therapy Program established.

**1988** | Health Care for Homeless Veterans program established.

**1989** | Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Center opened.

**1993** | Homeless domiciliary established.



**1994** | Human Engineering Research Laboratories opened.

**1996** | Highland Drive consolidated with University Drive and H. John Heinz III Progressive Care Center to become VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System.

**1999** | Mental Illness Research Education and Clinical Center established.

**2001** | Psychiatric Recovery Enhancement Program initiated.

**2013** | Campus closed and all Veterans health care consolidated at University Drive and H.J. Heinz campuses.

**2021** | Ownership transferred to City of Pittsburgh.



## FIRST WOMAN IN VA HOSPITAL LEADERSHIP

### Neuropsychiatrist Dr. Valerija Raulinaitis

- 1962 – First VA chief of staff, Chicago VA
- 1971 – First VA hospital director, Highland Drive

**1946**

VA acquires \$798,519, 14-acre site in Pittsburgh's Oakland neighborhood for a new VA medical center.

**1950**

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers breaks ground on general medical and surgical Veterans hospital.

**1954**

\$15 million, 742-bed hospital dedicated | Oakland and O'Hara campuses combined under one director with 1,300 employees.



**1960s** | Expands to 700 beds and 16 wards, receives accreditation for residency programs, conducts training in numerous medical subspecialties, and offers student training programs in affiliation with the University of Pittsburgh and other learning institutions.

**1984** | First heart transplant surgery performed to mark start of general organ transplant program.

**1987** | New wing with updated emergency department, radiology service area, operating and recovery rooms, critical care department, pharmacy, prosthetic and sensory aids department, and supply section dedicated.

**1989** | Liver transplant program established.

**1999** | Geriatric Research, Education and Clinical Center of Excellence established.

**2001** | 108-bed, 57,000-square-foot bed tower addition opens. | Designated a National Kidney Transplant Center. | Center for Health Equity Research and Promotion established.

**2002** | First living donor kidney transplant performed. | Internet site launched.

**2003** | Dialysis unit dedicated.

**2004** | First VA independent, in-house liver and kidney transplant center opened.



**2006** | VA facilities nationwide adopt revolutionary VAPHS-developed strategies that markedly reduce hospital-acquired MRSA infections.

**2007** | \$37 million, nine-level, 1,500-space parking garage opened. | \$2 million outpatient pharmacy renovation completed.

**2011** | 1,730-square-foot women's health clinic opened | \$9.2 million outpatient surgical suite opened.

**2012** | \$75.8 million consolidation building opened. | Pennsylvania's first Fisher House opened.

**2013** | \$30 million research building dedicated.

# New Services for Women Veterans



## WOMEN VETERANS HEALTH SUBSTANCE-USE DISORDER CLINIC

A new patient aligned care team (PACT) at our University Drive (UD) campus fills the gap in substance use disorder (SUD) treatment for women. The team provides integrated and comprehensive gender-specific primary and mental health care for women with alcohol, opioid and/or stimulant addiction in a team-based collaborative setting. You can take advantage of this expertise through your current PACT or by transferring to the SUD PACT at UD.



## ON-DEMAND BIRTH CONTROL FOR WOMEN

Women Veterans enrolled with us for health care can now request a 12-month supply of birth control. The initiative is part of a research project to see whether providing a 12-month supply improves contraceptive access for women Veterans. You are welcome to take part whether you need a new prescription for birth control or already have one: **Just call 412-360-3484 or 412-360-3677.**



## MVP: Women Veterans in Research

The Million Veteran Program (MVP) in 2021 focused on women Veterans in research to better understand and address their specific health care needs. MVP collects genetic, military exposure, lifestyle and

health information from all Veterans enrolled in the program. If more women from diverse backgrounds join MVP, researchers can ensure advances in modern medicine work for women from all backgrounds. Our MVP program launched in August 2011. More than 18% of our women Veterans (1,250+) are enrolled. **For more information or to enroll, visit [www.va.mvp](http://www.va.mvp) or call 866-441-6075.**



## Protect Yourself from Phishing Scams

Phishing is the most common way criminals try to steal your personal information. The attacker sends an email designed to deceive you into giving them sensitive information or unauthorized access to your device. The message appears to be from a real company, but the email address is off by a few letters. The email can include large attachments, or too-good-to-be-true offers.

VA will never call you or send you an email or text message asking for your financial, health or other personal information. VA also will never contact you with threats of jail or lawsuits. If you receive a suspicious call, email or text claiming to be from VA, do not respond. Instead:

- Hang up on suspicious calls.
- Do not open questionable emails or click on any links or attachments.
- Call VA at 1-800-827-1000.



For more information, visit  
<https://bit.ly/3CpbYeo>.

# VetQ&A

## Answering Your Important Questions

### VETERANS CONNECT

Issue 12 |  
2022

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**Q. I am fully vaccinated. Do I need to wear a face mask when visiting VA Pittsburgh facilities?**

**A.** Yes. VA requires everyone in buildings where health care is provided to wear medical procedure face masks. The CDC's February 2022 mask guidance does not apply to health care settings. If you have concerns about wearing a face mask, your provider will work with you to safely get the care you need.

**Q. Did the FDA lift the ban preventing service members and civilians stationed in certain parts of Europe between 1980 and 1996 from donating blood?**

**A.** Yes. The FDA in 2020 lifted its ban on blood donations from individuals who resided for six months or more on U.S. military bases in Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium and the Netherlands between 1980 and 1990 or on bases in Greece, Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Italy between 1980 and 1996. The FDA made the change after finding no reported cases of a fatal brain disease commonly known as "mad cow disease" associated with time spent on U.S. military bases in Europe. U.S. bases at the time sourced potentially tainted beef from the United Kingdom. If an agency previously rejected you as a blood donor because of overseas service, it might require you to apply for reinstatement before you can give blood.

**Q. I already had COVID-19. Do I still need the vaccine?**

**A.** Yes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, COVID-19 re-infection is possible. You should receive the COVID-19 vaccine even if you had an infection previously. The immunity that someone gains from having an infection like COVID-19 is known as natural immunity. This natural immunity varies from person to person. For some, it may not last long at all. Experts are still studying natural immunity for COVID-19, but because re-infection may be possible, you still need to receive the vaccine for greater protection.

**Veterans Connect delivers news and information  
of interest to area Veterans.**

Please send suggestions, comments and requests to [VAPHSEditor@va.gov](mailto:VAPHSEditor@va.gov).



# VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System

University Drive | Pittsburgh, PA 15240

[www.pittsburgh.va.gov](http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov)

412-822-2222 | 866-482-7488

## VETERANS CONNECT Issue 12 | 2022



### APPLY FOR VA HEALTH CARE

**Are you a Veteran who is not enrolled for VA health care?** To find out if you are eligible to enroll in VA health care, call VA toll-free at 877-222-8387, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. or apply online at [www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply](http://www.va.gov/health-care/how-to-apply).

## Don't Miss a Thing!



VAPHS



VAPittsburgh



### Free Flu Shots

A flu shot is a simple, safe and effective way to **keep you and your loved ones healthy** during this flu season.

Starting late September, get your free flu shot:

1. During your regularly scheduled VA Pittsburgh appointments, including our outpatient clinics.
2. Walk-in clinics available weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at both campuses—no appointment necessary.
3. After hours and weekends in our Emergency Department at our University Drive campus.



### Introduction to Whole Health | Mondays, 11 a.m.

VA is transforming health care by putting the patient's goals first. To register, use your premium My HealtheVet account to send a secure message to **PITTSBURGH-WHOLE HEALTH\_WH**.

### Veterans: We're hiring!

Through Veteran Recruitment Appointment (VRA), eligible Veterans can apply for VA Pittsburgh jobs without competition to positions at any grade level through GS-11.

#### How to apply through VRA:

Submit your resume and supporting documents via:

1. Email: [VAPHSVRA@va.gov](mailto:VAPHSVRA@va.gov)
2. Fax: 412-822-3559
3. Mail: VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System  
Human Resources (05-A)  
1010 Delafield Road | Pittsburgh, PA 15215

#### What to include:

- Your resume
- A copy of your DD-214 military discharge paperwork
- An SF-15 if you are claiming 10-point preference for a service-connected disability
- Your VA Disability Letter if you are a service-connected disabled Veteran